

Phuket Gazette

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'THERE IS NO NEED FOR AN EXPERT'S OPINION' Park chief bans climbing

■ Closure of more than 1,000 routes to damage Thailand's reputation as holiday climbing destination

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

A NEW national park chief has banned rock climbing on a number of internationally popular limestone outcroppings in areas under his jurisdiction on Koh Yao Noi, ruling the sites as unsafe.

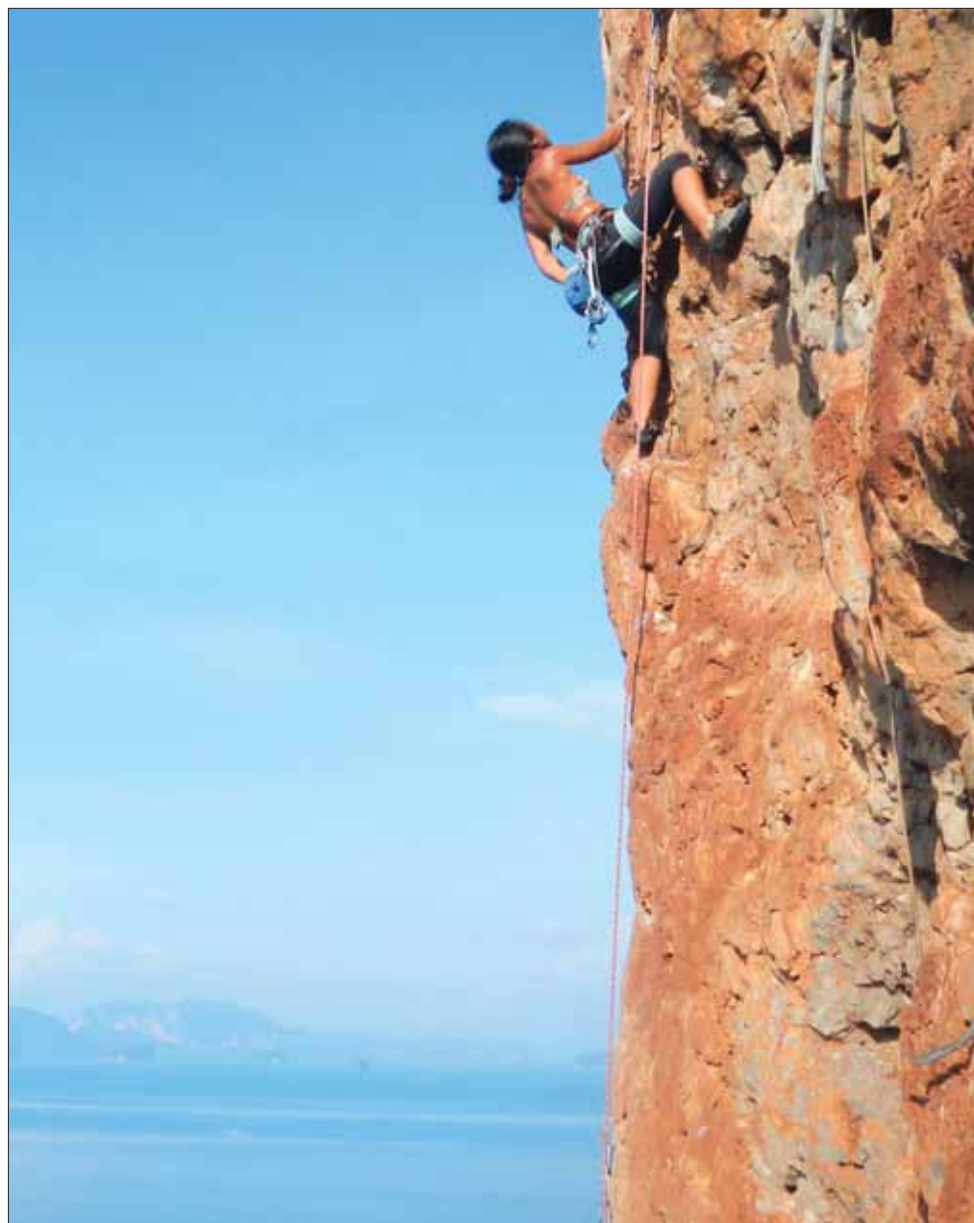
"Climbing is an extreme sport and a risky activity. Even though there are safety regulations, and well-tested equipment is being used, there is still the possibility of someone falling and dying," said Worapot Lomlim, the Ao Phang Na National Park chief. "There is no need for an expert's opinion on this; I can see myself that it is not safe."

The move by Mr Worapot, who took up his post in November, to close Dump Wall, Watchtower, Big Tree Wall, The Mitt, HD Wall, Koh Roi, Grateful Wall and The Hang, kills some of Thailand's top off-the-beaten path climbing holiday destinations.

DESTINATION CLIMBING

"In the last decade, Thailand has been able to position itself as an exotic climbing destination that is able to offer a nice combination of sea and rock experiences," explained Riccardo Mereu, a certified Climbing Wall Instructor (CWI) and the blogger behind PhuketClimbing.Blogspot.com. "Rock climbing is very popular in Railay, Tonsai and Chong Plee here in the south, while the north is dominated by the Crazy Horse Crag in Chiang Mai."

Thailand climbing destinations, such as Railey, Tonsai and Crazy Horse, regularly



A local climber drinks up the view on HD Wall on Koh Yao Noi. Photo: Riccardo Mereu

attract world-class rock climbers. This month, Alex Johnson, professional climber for The North Face, and Sasha DiGiulian, Climbing Female Overall World Champion and member of the USA climbing team, both put their hands on Thai rock.

"Hanging out over the Andaman Sea

climbing a beautiful limestone roof. Paradise living here!" Ms DiGiulian recently posted on an Instagram photo of her deepwater soloing, that is, climbing over deep water without ropes, in Railey...

Continued on Pages 4-5

Snake strikes kissy tourist at island show

OFFICIALS temporarily closed a Chalong snake show after an illegally possessed 2.5-meter-long python bit a Chinese tourist on the nose after she kissed the serpent.

The snake owner and the handler both face charges.

Full stories Page 3

BUSINESS



Lighthouse Market goes from monthly to weekly due to consumer demand.

PROPERTY



Pavilions Phuket leverages Layan Beach proximity to hit target market.

LIFE&STYLE



Triple circumnavigation of Phuket proves too much for Australian athlete.



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LOCAL NEWS

Briefly

Officers search for 11 escaped Rohingya

OFFICERS are hunting for 11 Rohingya who escaped from the Phang Nga Shelter for Children and Families on January 8.

Using CCTV footage, Khao Lak Police were able to determine that the group escaped through an open window on the second floor of the shelter at about 2am, and then got into a white pick-up truck that was parked down the road.

The truck's licence plate number was not clearly visible in the video.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Phi Phi touts yet to be found by island cops

OFFICERS are hunting more gibbon touts on Phi Phi Island after receiving a video of a man using the protected species as a photo prop for tourists.

Though officers have struggled with touts getting the drop on them and fleeing before they arrived, officials did not specify whether or not officers would be going undercover.

The video was sent to the *Gazette* by a tourist who asked not to be named.

Another video tip-off was sent to officials in November, yet the evidence yielded no results.

– *Kongleaphy Keam*

Finnish woman slashed while fighting off thieves



Finnish national Mari Inkeri Ruohonen, 31, was seriously wounded when she attempted to fight off bag snatchers on January 9. Ms Ruohonen was returning to her hotel room by foot when the two thieves slashed her arm with a box cutter in an attempt to grab her bag. The men were later arrested and charged with theft causing serious injury and carrying a weapon in public without reasonable cause. For the full story, visit PhuketGazette.net. Photo: Karon Police

Family on boat trip spot Killer Whale in Patong

AN ENGLISH family holidaying in Phuket spotted a Killer Whale off Freedom Beach in Patong Bay on January 8.

Susan and Thomas Halleron were on a longtail boat with their son Joe when they spotted the unusual sight.

Patcharaporn Gaewmong, a Phuket Marine Biological Center (PMBC) veterinarian,

confirmed to the *Gazette* that the image sent was in fact an Orca. She added that last year's report of an Orca spotted near Koh Maithon was the only other sighting in seven years.

– *Gazette editors*

Driver charged in speedboat death of tourist

THE speedboat driver who killed a French snorkeller in Krabi on January 5 has been charged with reckless driving causing death.

Sylvie Thiebaut, 52, was snorkelling off Koh Poda when she was struck in the head by the speedboat's propeller and killed.

Mr Yothin is out on bail while police collect additional evidence.

– *Chutharat Plerin*

Tour bus flips in Phang Nga

A TOUR bus carrying 18 Chinese tourists flipped in Phang Nga at about 10pm on January 11.

The bus was on its way to Krabi International Airport when the driver reportedly 'lost control' on a sharp curve.

Zhang Shuai, a passenger on the bus who suffered head injuries, was taken to Vachira Phuket Hospital for treatment.

Officials are still investigating the incident and have yet to press any charges.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Officials arrest drug runners in series of raids

REGION 8 Police arrested two drug runners and seized nearly 70,000 *ya ba* (methamphetamine) pills in Phang Nga on January 8.

Jiraporn Promnoo, 42, and Somnuek Rammani, 51, were arrested with 10,000 *ya ba* pills after a tip off from another drug suspect led police to intercept a scheduled delivery.

The pair admitted being paid 20,000 baht to move the drugs from Krabi to Phang Nga, and provided additional information that led to about 60,000 more pills being seized from a house in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.

Ms Jiraporn and Mr Somnuek were charged with possession of a Category 1 drug with intent to sell.

– *Kritsada Mueanhawong*

Island's waste management policies mulled

IN AN effort to improve waste management on the island, Phuket officials are working toward implementing more efficient rubbish disposal policies.

Each subdistrict will be asked to separate their waste into green bins for food items, blue bins for foam and yellow bins for plastic waste, before sending it to the central facility to be incinerated in Saphan Hin.

The government has also allocated a budget of 530 million baht this year for renovating an incinerator that has been offline for nearly three years.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

Facebook post helps German relocate bag

A GERMAN tourist lucked out after a Facebook post by a fellow traveller helped reunite her with her lost bag.

Polish national Ewelina Moszczynska, 31, found the handbag next to her bungalow on Phi Phi Island on January 7.

Unable to find any identification, Ms Moszczynska was able to locate the owner by posting a photo of the owner found on the camera inside the bag.

– *Zohaib Sikander*

Police propose quick solutions to traffic woes

POLICE have banned parking during rush hour in a number of locations on the island in order to decrease traffic congestion.

These include Thepkasattri Road near the Heroines' Monument, as well as along the bypass road, Chao Fa East Road and Chao Fa West Road.

Officials also announced plans to change traffic flow in Phuket Town to help deal with rush-hour congestion.

The plan has yet to be approved.

– *Sukawin Tanthavanich*

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Python bites chummy tourist

By Kritsada Mueanhawong

OFFICIALS are scrambling to reevaluate snake show safety measures after a Chinese tourist was bitten by a 2.5-meter-long python that she kissed in Phuket on January 9.

"After the show, I took the python out, as usual, for the tourists to take photos with. Then, suddenly, a woman tried to kiss the snake without informing me of what she was doing," said Sarawut Toompo, the employee in charge of the snake at the time of the attack. "I think the python just panicked and was attempting to defend itself."

Mr Sarawut pointed out that it was against company policy to allow tourists to kiss the snakes.

Nonetheless, the company has taken responsibility for the incident, confirmed General Manager Krittiporn Poomkunchorn.

"Even though it was an accident, we have taken responsibility for all the tourist's expenses at the hospital in Phuket, as well as in China," Ms Krittiporn said. "She did not want to file a complaint about this. Maybe she realized it was her fault for trying to kiss the snake without checking with the handler first."



Jin Jing was bit while she attempted to kiss the reptile on the head. Photos: Kritsada Mueanhawong

The snake attack occurred at Phuket Bio Technology Co Ltd in Chalong, which has six snake boxes that house pythons, cobras and king cobras. The company also sells traditional herbal medicines and products made from snake skin.

Jin Jing, 29, was treated at Phuket International Hospital and flew back to China with her tour group on January 10, con-

firmed Santi Pawai, the director of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) Phuket Office.

Mr Sarawut was charged for recklessly performing his job and causing injury, despite his explanation of what happened.

Consequently, the owner of the snake was charged for the illegal possession of a protected wild animal, as he did not register the reptile with the Department of National

Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation's Protected Area Regional Office 5 (PARO).

PARO 5 also decreased Phuket Bio Technology's snake ownership licence from 85 to 53, the number of legal snakes currently on the premises.

The company will remain closed until officials conclude their investigation.

Illegal guides to be deported, blacklisted



Mr Wu is the first to be deported and blacklisted. Photo: MOTS

A CHINESE national working as an illegal tour guide in Phuket will be the first to be deported and blacklisted in Thailand, as the country takes a staunch stance on the ever-growing issue, confirmed officials.

"Any foreigner caught working as a tour guide will now be deported," said Santi Pawai, director of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) Phuket Office.

Chinese national Daolin Wu, 23, was caught working as a tour guide at Promthep Cape on January 11.

"The illegal guides usually find their way back into the business, but we will put an end to this. We will deport them and blacklist them. I am personally following the case of Mr Wu to ensure that he does not come back to Thailand," Mr Santi said. — Chutharat Plerin

Deadly driver forced to fess up

THE partner of a German killed in an alleged drunk driving accident in Phuket last month vowed to push for the harshest penalties against the driver, who confessed to reckless driving leading to death.

Jakarin Rodpradit, 26, originally denied responsibility for the crash between his car and the motorbike driven by Andreas Walter, 47, with his partner Patcharin Lammai, 35, riding pillion.

"I was conscious, but unable to move immediately after the accident. The driver didn't stop; he kept trying to drive forward over the top of my boyfriend. I couldn't do anything," Ms Patcharin told the *Gazette* from her hospital bed in December. "Thankfully, a tuk-tuk driver and local man who witnessed the accident were able to stop the driver."

The first round of negotiations failed after Mr Jakarin alleged that the accident was,



The driver confessed after he was presented with CCTV evidence that Ms Patcharin was able to obtain. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

in fact, caused by Mr Walter.

However, independently of the police, Ms Patcharin's relatives built a case against Mr Jakarin, searching for CCTV footage that might reveal exactly what happened.

"About a week after the accident, Ms Patcharin brought us CCTV footage and witnesses that clearly proved that Mr Jakarin was at fault. When faced with the new evidence, he confessed to the charges," Lt

Nipon Temsung of the Karon Police told the *Gazette*.

"Mr Jakarin then requested the chance to conduct negotiations again. Either way, he will face charges in court."

Ms Patcharin confirmed to the *Gazette* that she would push for the harshest penalties against Mr Jakarin, as well as search for additional criminal charges, such as knowingly providing false information to the police.

— Kongleaphy Keam



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German's partner forces criminal to confess to deadly reckless driving

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Once released from Bangkok Hospital Phuket, Ms Patcharin travelled with the victim's body to Germany. Photo: Kongleaphy Keam

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"If it was a normal crash, and the man had stopped, Andreas might still be alive," Ms Patcharin said. "Maybe he just thought that I was some bar girl with a tourist, so he didn't care."

"Police did not test his blood alcohol levels at the scene and just let him drive away. Then he lied and denied the charges until we gathered enough evidence against him. We will see him in court."

— Kongleaphy Keam

Park chief

From page 1

SAFETY

The major safety concerns in rock climbing can be broken down into three different categories: loose rocks, human error and unsafe protection – such as corroded bolts placed into the wall, explained Heather Miner, co-owner of The Mountain Shop Adventures.

Despite Mr Worapot's concerns about the safety of climbing in Koh Yao Noi, Ms Miner assured the *Gazette* that the walls are incredibly safe.

"The rock is high quality, the protection is safe and the climbing is located in a spectacular setting," Ms Miner said. "The walls have been cleaned of loose rock as much as possible... and bolted with titanium bolts to ensure that the protection is safe... Human error can happen anywhere."

The use of titanium bolts, which can rake up a bill of between 5,500-8,000 baht per route, is essential in Thailand. Over the last few years, stainless steel bolts on routes in the Kingdom have been swapped out with titanium bolts and new routes put up throughout Thailand are being done so with titanium bolts.

"Stainless steel bolts are commonly used throughout the world in climbing areas. These bolts have been proven to break in environments such as Thailand. Titanium bolts are the solution to this problem," Ms Miner explained.

In 2012, there were about 100 bolted routes on Koh Yao Noi, with more routes having gone up since then.

The costs of bolting the routes is mostly footed by a small group of dedicated rock climbers, reported Climbing, a US-based magazine, in 2012.

"Koh Yao Noi has been en-

tirely equipped using titanium bolts and red-glue, which at the moment are the top material in terms of safety standards. This outstanding job was started in 2004, a few days before the tsunami, by Marc Miner [Ms Miner's husband] and his friends," explained Mr Mereu.

A number of the bolts used in Koh Yao Noi were donated by the Titanium Project, which

accepts cash donations from climbers around the world, and then passes those donations to the climbers placing the orders for bolts each year.

"Considering that most of the climbing areas are frequented by local climbers, hence constantly inspected, all the routes are very safe and there is very little room for danger," Mr Mereu explained. "In any case, we need to remember that we are talking

about rock climbing, which is itself an activity that exposes its lovers to a higher dose of risk than badminton, for instance."

ECONOMIC FACTORS

Unlike Railey, the climbing in Koh Yao Noi is still a relatively 'small business'. Nonetheless, it provides an important source of income for local communities on the island.

"Rock climbing is a large part of the economy of Tha Khao [one of the villages on Koh Yao Noi], as well as the island in general. Bungalows, restaurants, massage shops, local boatmen and so on, are all losing business because of the closure," explained Ms Miner. "Tha Khao is the closest village to the climbing routes, and it is where boats to the climbing areas depart from, so this is the village that is being most affected."



Closing Koh Yao Noi simply means deliberately obstructing the growth and the respectability of Thailand as a world-class climbing destination.

— Riccardo Mereu

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kills Koh Yao Noi climbing

Though rock climbers are not known for being five-star hotel guests, the money they spend is mostly directly injected into local communities instead of feeding the profits of large travel organizations, explained Mr Mereu, who works for a large travel company in Phuket.

"Closing Koh Yao Noi simply means deliberately obstructing the growth and the respectability of Thailand as a world-class climbing destination, and most importantly, depriving the local community of an additional income that would otherwise be entirely lost."

However, Mr Worapot said that the closure of the routes will not have any major impact on tourism or local businesses on the island.

"Only a small number of the tourists who come to Koh Yao Noi do so for climbing. The safety and lives of those visiting our park is much more important than the small amount of income that can be derived by allowing the activ-



Grateful Wall, a boat-only access climbing destination, provides a unique experience. Photo: Riccardo Mereu

ity. I hope that people will understand this and enjoy other activities offered on our island," Mr Worapot said.

DASHED SOLUTION

Climbing in national parks is

not illegal, confirmed Mr Worapot. However, it is necessary to file certain paperwork, and permission must be granted by the park chief.

"Normally, climbing can be done in a park if the operators get permission from officers.

All they have to do is send a letter requesting permission to conduct this kind of business in the area," Mr Worapot said.

"In this case, it doesn't matter if they do apply to designate the area as a climbing zone, as

I have already decided to ban this activity. The walls are too steep, it is too dangerous.

"Please do not compare us to other places, as every officer has their own way of making decisions, and I say 'no' to this."

Mr Worapot said that he was taking a hard line on the issue following operators disobeying orders banning climbing.

"We have warned them a number of times, but the businesses keep getting bigger and bigger. I must be firm."

Mr Worapot has posted signs informing operators and tourists that climbing in the area is illegal. However, he pointed out that tourists weren't his primary focus.

"Operators know that they are not supposed to climb, but still do. Tourists will not climb without operators to lead them," he said. "So, we will not press charges against tourists or fine them."

*Additional Reporting by
Kongleaphy Keam*



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IN THIS ISSUE

News: My fault, says highway chief; Phi Phi construction ban eased. **Pages 2 & 3**

INSIDE STORY: No nudes is good news? **Pages 4 & 5**

AROUND THE REGION: A mash hit in Khao Lak. **Page 8**

AROUND THE ISLAND: Tanks for the memories. **Page 9**

PEOPLE: Arabella Churchill. **Pages 10 & 11**

LIFESTYLE: Wax works and stolen art. **Pages 12 & 13**

WATERFORD CLASS: Pennapa Wuttimanop. **Page 18**

GOOD LIVING: Fanning the flames at Wildfire. **Page 19**

SLURPY CHIRPY CHEAP EATS: Patong for pennies. **Page 20**

NEW! THE GRAY - a first frenzy.

Swiss man arrested for pedophilia

Dam 'holds enough for the high season'

Are nudists itching to invade Thailand?

Limo and BMW crash kills one, injures two

Can I bring my Filipina maid to Thailand?

Why feeding wildlife is a VERY BAD idea

Naturism market may have to remain untapped

Hey you! You need suit? You NEED suit!!!

The gift of hindsight

THE page one story a decade ago was about water supplies being enough to keep Phuket's thirst quenched for the high season. However, the juicy part of the January 14-20 issue was the 'Inside Story': Are nudists itching to invade Thailand?

The Tourism Authority of Thailand had called on Phuket Governor Udomsak Usvarangkura to see if the island would be willing to go full monty to please Goldman & Partners, the operator of the Costa Natura 'naturist' resort on the Spanish Mediterranean coast, as it looked to expand into Thailand.

The website of Castaways Travel, which specialized in 'clothing optional' tourism, was quoted in the *Gazette* article as stating: "The reason Thailand is included in our

website is that we believe social nudity and nudist beaches, if not resorts, will happen in the future. Nudity is not yet accepted in Thailand, although topless sunbathing is quite common... Finding a deserted stretch of beach to bask in the sun nude is possible, but you will have to hunt for the spots, since nudity is not accepted in any public area whatsoever."

Clearly, Castaways Travel was wrong. Nonetheless, their website – ten years down the line – holds the same position: eventually Thailand is going to be down for a naked frolic.

However, as an Austrian and American tourist found out just last

week – that time hasn't come yet.

Good, old-fashioned police work saw Patong officers track down the two young women cruising

the streets of Patong, baring their breasts to the general public last week. The women were dragged down to the police station, given a lecture, a slap on the... wrist, and fined 500 baht.

If bared breasts are going to cause issues on the street of Patong, good luck sharing them in Cape Panwa, Thalang or elsewhere in Thailand.

In fact, it was just in November last year that police booted two foreigners from a public park in Phuket

Town for stripping down to their bikinis to sunbathe.

"I am aware that officers took this action to ensure the safety of the women," Capt Chatchai Choonoo of Phuket City Police told the *Gazette* at the time. "We do not have officers stationed at this park, or other similar parks, to ensure the safety of women who might be sexually harassed while sunbathing in bikinis."

If they aren't safe in bikinis in the middle of the day, how safe is an elderly German going to be, if he decides to give up the banana hammock and let everything soak up the sun? Perhaps we will just have to wait for greater police presence on the island before we once again review the option to go full monty.

– Isaac Stone Simonelli

British former monk arrested for child porn

A 64-YEAR-OLD British man was arrested in Chiang Mai province on January 6 after pornographic photos of children were found on his computer's hard drive.

The Department of Special Investigation (DSI) led police to arrest Fabian Frederick Blandford, an English teacher and former monk, at his house in Chiang Mai.

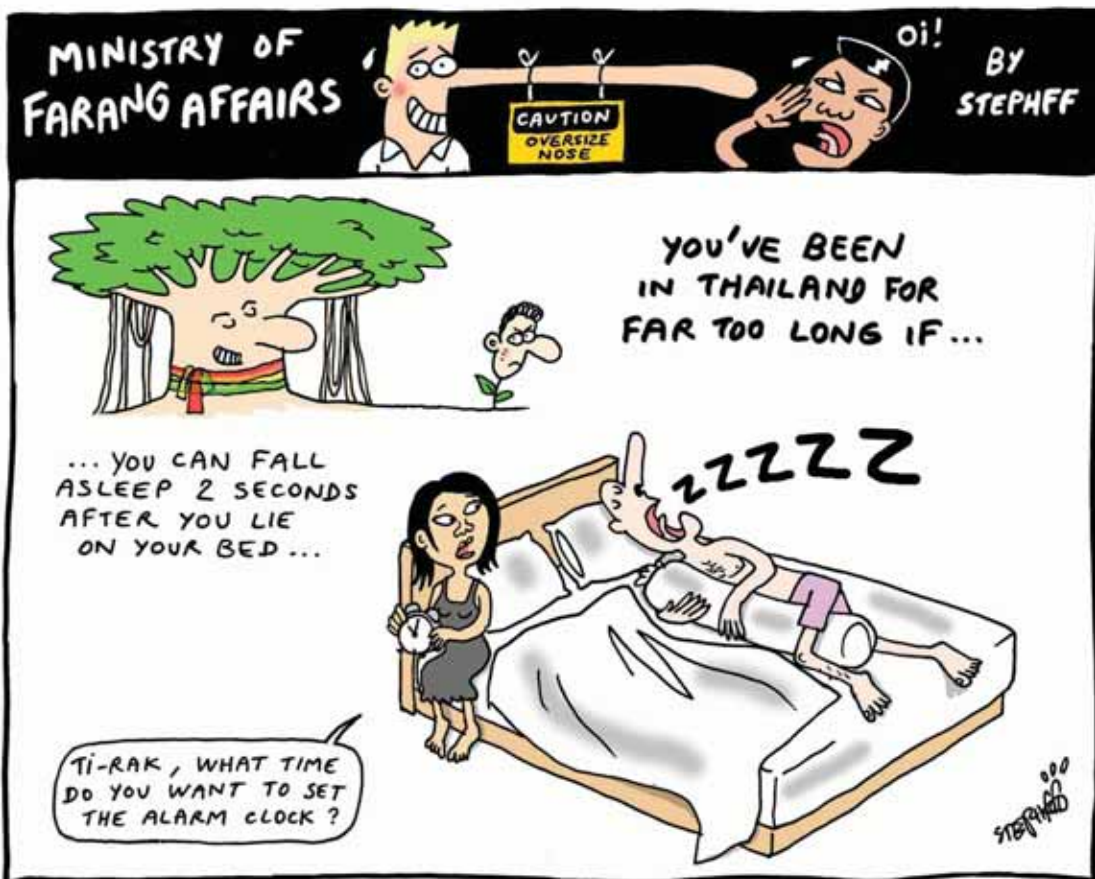
The arrest was made after the DSI was alerted by US Homeland Security and the US National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that several pornographic photos of children had been posted by a computer at the IP address held by Mr Blandford in the middle of November.

Police alleged that Mr Blandford pretended to be a kind old man to get close to children, whom he allegedly abused and photographed.

Health groups threaten to sue over project funding cuts

A NETWORK of health promotion organizations has demanded the government allow the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) resume funding of projects for which it has signed contracts.

United under the name 'Thai Health Movement', the organizations have threatened to sue



ThaiHealth in the Administrative Court.

The 20 public organizations gathered on January 12 to discuss their official response to the suspension of funding for public benefit projects and the sacking of seven ThaiHealth board members by order of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO).

Myanmar killer suspects are 'minors'

TWO out of four Myanmar suspects currently in custody for allegedly killing a 18-year-old schoolgirl in Ranong last Sep-

NATIONAL NEWS Briefly

tember are asking that Myanmar authorities confirm that they are minors in the hope that doing so will result in the justice system treating them as juveniles.

Ranong Governor Suriyan Kanchanasil on January 9 revealed that the two suspects' relatives recently presented documents showing that the duo were aged under 20.

However, the evidence was strong and incriminating and police were confident they had

captured the killers – not scapegoats, Governor Suriyan said.

The schoolgirl's body was found on September 28 in an alley in Tambon Bang Rin. She was stabbed multiple times.

PM slams Suthep over rubber price

PRIME Minister Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha on January 11 slammed Suthep Thaugsuban, chairman of the People's

Democratic Reform Foundation, for calling for a state subsidy to boost the price of natural rubber from 33-34 baht to 60 baht per kilogram.

Mr Suthep had called on PM Prayut to invoke absolute power under the interim charter's Article 44 and take quick action on subsidizing rubber farmers, as prices continued to fall. He also suggested that the government set a purchase price and determine what products can be produced using natural rubber.

However, PM Prayut rejected Mr Suthep's suggestions, saying that the government had decided to look for other measures to help rubber farmers.

Thailand takes heat from UN over cases of 'disappearance'

THE United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein on January 6 urged the Thai government to take decisive and sustained efforts to investigate the whereabouts of at least 82 people listed as disappeared.

Mr Hussein also called on the government to criminalize enforced disappearance through legislation, in line with international standards. Thailand has no specific law on forced disappearance.

Official name change to 'Heangjobhapppylife' brings no additional happiness to Surin man

A 30-YEAR-OLD Surin man clearly hadn't made it to Act II, Scene II of Romeo and Juliet when he made the bold choice to legally change his name to 'Heangjobhapppylife Makelifebetter'.

Mr Heangjobhapppylife, presumably a bastardized attempt at spelling 'HandJobMakeHappyLife', had a criminal record for theft, but became an online sensation after officers confirmed to the skeptical public that his name was in fact Heangjobhapppylife Makelifebetter.

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, though perhaps might be a bit more cumbersome, which was one of the many complaints Mr Heangjobhapppylife had about his new name, reported Sanook.com.

The man had hoped the change in name would, in fact, make his life better, but it turns out that it was just difficult to write and spell – no surprise there, given he didn't get it

right the first time.

Mr Heangjobhapppylife was allowed to make the change in his name in accordance with the Person Name Act, B.E. 2505 (1962), which states that one can change their name if it has a good meaning and the person is happy to have it.

The man had his name changed in July 2014. However, by December 2015 he was back at the Surin district office to have his name changed back to Saen Soisoongnern.

Saman Warintharawat, Muang Surin district chief, explained to Mr Heangjobhapppylife that his original name was a beautiful one with a good meaning and it was given to him by his family. It was a name that he should be honored to have.

With that bit of encouragement, Mr Heangjobhapppylife returned home as the rose he is, with his new identification card reading: Saen Soisoongnern.

– Phuket Gazette

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Safety needed by land, sea and air

THIS year's high season for tourism has brought with it a surge in needless mishaps, injuries and deaths as tourists flock to our shores in pursuit of holiday happiness.

Many of the victims, without a doubt, presume that enough necessary measures are in place to ensure their safety. Rules and regulations do exist, but as our news pages chronicle week-in and week-out, there is no substitute for law enforcement backed up by simple common sense – such as containing the desire to kiss a python at a snake show.

Military strategists have traditionally broken down the dynamics of warfare to land, sea and air forces. Perhaps it would be enlightening to view tourist safety issues in Phuket from the same broad perspective.

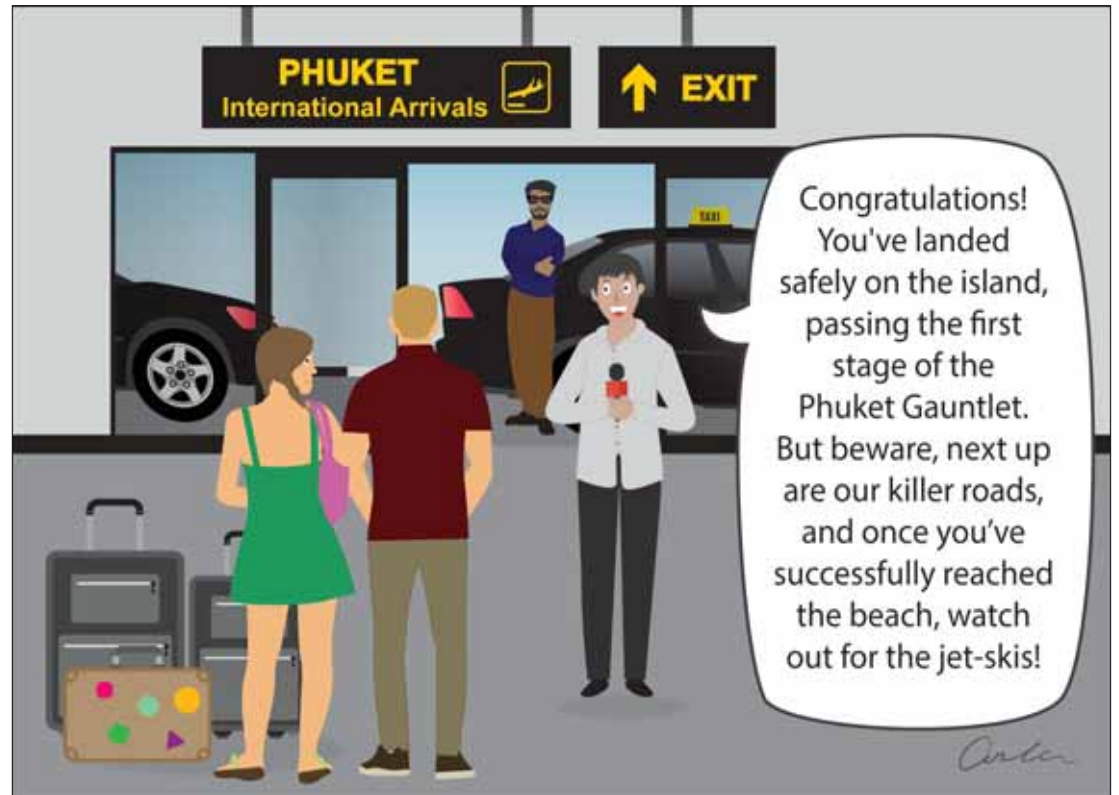
As most foreign tourists to Phuket arrive by plane, let us start in the sky. A complete overhaul is underway with the discredited Thai Department of Civil Aviation having been replaced by the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand. With ever-increasing competition, we can only hope that the new body can improve commercial airline safety, not only on international routes, but also in the all-important domestic market, which feeds the lion's share of visitors to Phuket.

The last thing Phuket needs is a repeat of a disaster like the crash of One-Two-GO Flight 269 that claimed the lives of 90 passengers at Phuket Airport in 2006.

On terra firma, Phuket roadways continue to be the leading and most consistent cause of tourist deaths. Contributing factors include the lack of safe, reasonably-priced public transport, woefully inadequate law enforcement and the prevailing 'culture of carelessness' among Thai motorists that seems to transmit itself like a contagion to so many foreign tourists after they touch ground here, immediately going into full 'when in Rome' mode.

Last, but not least, is the totally unacceptable number of marine accidents that have transpired in recent months. Despite relatively calm seas this time of year, the fact remains that the high season is haymaking time for speedboat and jet-ski rental operators.

Sadly, the jet-ski industry continues to enjoy the tacit support of the agency responsible for its regulation, which is why we must endure an endless series of accident-related reports.



Negotiations should not set you free

Re: German's partner forces confession of deadly reckless driving, January 11

Cowards like this, who attempt to flee, should face the full force of the law – unfortunately the penalties will be weak.

Witness the 'Bangkok Blubber' this week – big men at the time.

Well done to Ms Patcharin for standing up to this killer and not allowing 'negotiations' to free him from what he has done. It's a shame she had to do the investigative work the police should have done, but this is only to be expected.

*Mister Ree
Gazette forum*

Motorists are not stopped on the go

Re: Opinion: Phuket, drive defensively, January 10

Getting stopped and popped at a roadside sobriety test and getting caught for a moving violation are two different things, and there lies the problem.

The Thai police are not equipped or trained for road-law enforcement. Drivers are never stopped while driving.

That's why everyone drives like a maniac. There are no consequences.

Speeding tickets are ignored, driving without a license is a small fine. And so it goes.

*Pinot
Gazette forum*

Letters to the Editor

*Do you have an opinion to voice?
Email Editor@PhuketGazette.net*

Great idea for quick traffic solutions

Re: Phuket police propose quick solutions to traffic congestion, January 8

At last! Great idea.

The place it's really needed at is the beach end of Prabamee Road in Patong, between the Dolphin Monument and Rat-U-Thit Road.

This would go some way in alleviating the massive tailbacks from Patong through Kalim.

Heading inland from the beach with two lanes would allow one lane for turning right on Rat-U-Thit and one heading toward Kathu. It would also help to ease traffic merging.

*Chob
Gazette forum*

Penalties must be conducive to crime

Re: Drunk restaurant patrons beat down by waiters in parking lot [video], January 6

These types of people think they have the right to take the law into their own hands.

Anarchy will prevail until the justice system starts dishing out penalties conducive to the crime and abolish the 'I confess for a 50 per cent

reduction' rubbish.

More deaths will occur and the judicial system is solely responsible for the above reason.

*Skip
Gazette forum*

Well done, catching illegal tour guides

Re: Illegal Phuket tour guides to be deported, blacklisted, January 12

This should be the same for every illegal tour guide, dive instructor or anyone working illegally.

By clearing the garbage, the island can rebuild a safe place for tourists.

Illegal companies do things on the cheap and cut safety standards, and also cost legal workers from all nations work.

Illegal tour guides are taking money from the pockets of the Thai people, which is wrong however you look at it.

*Simon Lomas
Facebook*

Surely Patong has a budget for cleanup

Re: Officials mull waste management policies in Phuket, January 11

The amount of rubbish left on the beach everyday is disgraceful.

Surely the local government has enough money to buy a sand cleaning machine to drag up and down the beach at Patong.

*Adam Clarke
Facebook*

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Solving tuk-tuk woes

FIRST PERSON

THIS year has been one of the most difficult ones in my 20 years of being a tuk-tuk driver on the island.

Because many of the newer tourists come here on tour packages, they are in no need of public transport – they all travel on buses or minivans.

We really need help from the government in these situations, as it is taking away income from local people. However, we sometimes feel that the government is not very attuned to what goes on in our field of work.

It would be very beneficial to both parties if they allowed a spokesperson from the tuk-tuk consortium to be involved while setting regulations and guidelines.

Currently, there is no one representing us in the government and so they often make rules based on what appeases the general public.

One such disconnect was when we were receiving a lot of complaints about our prices. So, together as a consortium, we set our prices to what we perceived was fair to everyone. However, officials were unhappy about us regulating our own business and informed us that they would be in charge of setting prices.

Even though the prices varied from what we thought was fair, we abided by their decision. The



Supap Pramkaew, 49, is head of the Karon tuk-tuk consortium. He has been a tuk-tuk driver in Phuket for 20 years and has lived on the island for more than 30 years. He is originally from Nakhon Sri Thammarat.

Here he talks about the current issues that tuk-tuk drivers face and how the government could help alleviate some of those problems.

only problem we had was that they demanded that we make signs displaying the new prices, but did not provide us a budget to do so. So we ended up using 200,000 baht of our own money to comply with their wishes.

Another major issue that we face is the types of tourists who are coming to the island.

We feel that officials only focus on the number of tourists who come to Phuket, without any regard to the consequences for us.

In the past, most tourists were able to communicate with us in English.

For the most part, this is the only language that we speak other than Thai. Now, however, many tourists are only able to communicate in their own language, making it extremely difficult for us to explain safety regulations and prices to them, or understand them when they are trying to explain directions to their destinations. This really

affects our business, as we are the ones who deal directly with them on a day-to-day basis.

The government can help us by making it mandatory for hotels and resorts to give guests keycards with their address and phone number displayed on them, and perhaps a few general rules about customs and public transport, so that we can ensure we are bringing them to the correct destination and charging the correct prices, and they can better understand safety regulations and general instructions.

Particularly in cases when someone is drunk or has many children, tourists need to take responsibility for themselves and their families, and not argue with us if we refuse to allow them in our tuk-tuk, because at the end of the day, we are held responsible if something goes wrong.

The keycards could help diffuse a lot of arguments that we get into when we are unable to communicate correctly. Whenever situations like this occur, we always end up looking like the bad guys.

We only ask that the government help us so we can help them, and together offer quality service to Phuket's tourists.



We need to calm down and weigh the consequences. Photo: quapan

Laws of retaliation

AN EYE for an eye, or the law of retaliation, is the mentality that seems to be taking over Phuket these days.

There have been several recent incidents where tempers flared and punches (or worse) were thrown at the slightest provocation. However, the recent video of a Krabi van driver attacking a foreigner on a motorbike after he allegedly hit the van's sideview mirror is a prime example of this.

Phuket is a multicultural city, and becoming more so by the day. With occupancy rates flattening, you can see tourist numbers distributed more evenly, meaning that you won't just see foreigners during the traditional 'high season' – there is a steady flow of visitors throughout the year. Add to that an influx of expats and recurring visitors, and you have a society that needs to learn to coexist more than ever.

But where can one lay the blame? From a local's perspective, the outsiders are taking over their jobs, and so there's bound to be some resentment there. But, as foreigners, we need to accept certain responsibilities and obligations towards our hosts as well. This includes acknowledging their values and respecting the fact that there are differences between their cul-

ture and our own.

That being said, we see plenty of resentment between Thais as well. Another recent PGTV video shows restaurant waiters beating their customers over an alleged dispute about attempting to kick a motorbike.

You can see four waiters mercilessly beating three customers, kicking them to the ground and bashing their heads in. You even see women being dragged and shoved around, as they try to intervene and break up the fight.

If an incident as trivial as someone trying to knock down your bike can cause such an unwarranted assault, I think we all need to take a step back and review our priorities.

I could go on about other incidents, such as a Patong tuk-tuk driver beating up a British tourist over a disputed fare, or a minivan driver caught on tape threatening a fellow motorist for blocking his path, but the message remains the same – consciously and collectively, we all need to calm down our quick tempers and resolve to weigh the consequences before reacting recklessly to an adverse situation.

Island View

By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

Words from the Wise

"I'm not a prophet or a stone age man – just a mortal with the potential of a superman. I'm living on."

– *David Bowie*

"Integrity is everything to me. I will not die ashamed. I will live on my deathbed knowing that I gave it my best shot, and everything else is meaningless to me."

– *Lemmy Kilmister*

Issues & Answers

What are the rules for trucks pulling boats?

THE other day I was driving past a pick-up truck towing a boat. Sometimes this can be dangerous if there is no indication – such as a piece of cloth or a flag – denoting the end of the boat for the car following behind.

I was wondering if a particular license is required for towing boats? Are there limited hours in which a person can drive with a boat in tow?

Jessica Anderson
Kathu

Lt Col Rungrit Rattanapagdee of the Phuket City Traffic Police replies:

Thank you for submitting

your inquiry with us.

Trailers used for towing boats must be registered with the Phuket Provincial Land Transport Office (PLTO) to legally acquire a licence plate for the trailer.

Those who possess a driver's licence are allowed to register their trailer with the PLTO.

Please note that there are no specific hours during which a vehicle with a trailer is allowed to operate. They are free to drive just as any other vehicle.

Send us your queries and we'll ask the right people to respond to them.

Submit your issue at:

www.PuketGazette.net/IssuesAnswers

Are we in for a rough ride this year?



Finance

By Don Freeman

THE past few years have been difficult, or mixed at best, for many investors in the stock market, with 2015 largely ending in another flat line performance – leading to predictions for more of the same in 2016. However, most predictions about 2015 from the start of last year were bullish and turned out to be off the mark, while low expectations for this year could just as easily turn out to be wrong.

The first half of 2015 was relatively calm thanks to good market fundamentals and bullish optimism (or perhaps complacency) until the following concerns began to chip away at investor confidence:

1. The further unexpected decline in commodity, especially oil, prices.
2. The strong US dollar.
3. Continued weak economic growth.
4. A currency devaluation along with economic uncertainty in China.
5. Uncertainty over when the US Fed would finally raise interest rates and by how much.

Summer ended in a reality check in the form of the August-to-October mini crash. And while there was a recovery for key market indices toward the end of the year, the



Composed of technology and 'new economy' stocks, the Nasdaq composite gained last year. Photo: bfshadow

mini crash hit investor confidence and brought a renewed investor focus on risk.

Upon closer inspection, 2015's stock market performance was not all bad, with some sectors or types of stocks performing better than others. For example, the Dow, which tends to be an investor bellwether but is still dominated by 'old economy' stocks, ended the year down 3.48 per cent while the technology and 'new economy' oriented Nasdaq composite actually gained 4.17 per cent.

Ironically, Apple Inc (NASDAQ: AAPL), the largest publicly traded stock in the world, which has risen 11 times in the last 12 years before 2015

and was added to the Dow in March, ended the year down for the first time since 2008.

On the other hand, new media stocks like Netflix, Inc (NASDAQ: NFLX), which rose 135.45 per cent for the biggest gain in the S&P 500, became more valuable than traditional media stocks like CBS Corporation (NYSE: CBS), while eCommerce giant Amazon.com, Inc (NASDAQ: AMZN) was the second best performer as traditional bricks-and-mortar retailers continued to stumble.

Meanwhile, energy stocks were among the biggest losers for the year as energy prices continued to fall.

Given 2015's stock market

performance and continued uncertainties, it should come as no surprise that investor expectations for 2016 are fairly low right now.

However, low expectations could actually be a good thing for investors as it increases the chances for more positive upside surprises on any good news, rather than larger downside moves on bad news.

Potentially positive 2016 news or catalysts could include:

1. Stronger global economic growth.
2. Better economic growth in China.
3. A bottom or a rebound in energy or oil prices.

Potentially negative 2016

headwinds could include:

1. Further rate hikes from the Fed.
2. Tepid global economic growth.
3. The strong dollar.
4. Weaker energy and commodity prices.
5. More geopolitical uncertainties.
6. Further terrorist attacks in the West.
7. The US presidential election.

Investors need to remember that predicting where the stock market will end in a new year is an annual Wall Street rite that's always going to be a part-art and part-science exercise with questionable accuracy. That's why you need to stick with a disciplined investment strategy and hold your emotions in check before making an investment decision based on any new year prediction, or for that matter, on any good or bad news in 2016.

Don Freeman, BSME is president of Freeman Capital Management, a Registered Investment Advisor with the US Securities Exchange Commission (SEC), based in Phuket. He has over 15 years experience working with expatriates, specializing in portfolio management, US tax preparation, financial planning and UK pension transfers. Don can be reached at 089-970-5795 or email: freemancapital@gmail.com.

Hostels to see boost Joint push for more investment

THE hostel business is expected to grow this year thanks to an increase in solo travellers from all over the world, according to a research team at Mahidol University.

"New developments will be seen in major tourist destinations such as Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Phuket," Burim Otakanon, deputy dean of the College of Management at Mahidol University, said on January 7.



Rise in solo travellers may boost hostel business. Photo: Unsplash

Academics urge new players to conduct research before investing, in order to differentiate themselves. – *The Nation*

THE finance minister has urged leaders of the private sector to work out how they can invest more and make Thailand a regional investment hub.

January 8 saw the first meeting of a working team on attracting investment. The team is headed by Finance Minister Apisak Tantivorawong, the representative from the government, and Bangkok Bank president Chartsiri Sophonpanich, representing the private sector.

Tos Chirathivat, CEO of Central Group and head of the working team for boosting incomes and spending, said the finance minister had urged the private sector to help out in the area of agricultural and community goods, especially by creating and developing distribution channels, particularly through modern retail.

He said the government and



Finance Minister Apisak Tantivorawong (left) expresses his views at a conference. Photo: The Nation

the private sector agreed on the need to promote the sale of agricultural and community products through modern trade and other channels.

"We will select a few major provinces to be the pilots for such projects, to be executed during this first quarter," said Mr Tos, adding that major modern retailers are urged to purchase agricultural and community goods

from farmers and small producers to boost their incomes," Mr Tos said.

"Today, many middle-to-higher-income earners spend money abroad. What we would like to do is stimulate them to spend money domestically. Meanwhile, lower-income earners should be helped by allowing them to travel on the mass-transit system cheaply."

– *The Nation*

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Lighthouse Market returns

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

BUILDING on its success last year, the Boat Lagoon Lighthouse Market is making the bold move of going from a monthly event to a weekly one, as it continues to provide island exposure for local vendors and big-name luxury goods dealers.

"The move to hold the market weekly is driven by consumer demand. Some people who wanted to eat, chill and shop at the event were struggling to make it in a specific week in the month," explained Kanittha Prasopsirikul, from 'By Kanittha', the company behind the market. "There was enough of this type of feedback last year to justify us moving to a more frequent schedule."

A redesign of the layout of the market will also have an impact on the experience, as more seating areas for visitors to eat, lounge and listen to live music will be provided.

"We want to create an outdoor theater concept. Something similar to 'theater in the park' or 'cinema in the park', which are both very popular community builders in the United States and elsewhere," Ms Kanittha said.

In order to make the extra space, the number of shops will be limited to 60. However, Ms



The popular monthly market returns to Phuket on a weekly basis starting on January 29. Photo: Gazette file

Kanittha points out that a larger space will be provided for the vendors to prepare their dishes or ply their goods.

During the four occasions the Lighthouse Market ran from January to May last year, the number of vendors and sponsors on site steadily increased from 65 to 88 with the average being about 76.

The first event saw the Phuket community march in with a head count of 1,437

people, excluding vendors, joining the event. The numbers dwindled slightly in February, but spiked when a total of 1,676 people joined the extended three-day event in May. On average, about 1,312 people joined the market each time, matching the standard daily traffic in the Boat Lagoon, which fluctuates between 1,000 and 1,500 visitors.

Though the market will hold on to its original concept of

combining the wonders of traditional Thai markets with the class and quality of the Boat Lagoon, it will slightly shift gears in 2016 to focus more on the concept of creating a 'chilled out, social' destination for Thais, tourists and expats, explains Ms Kanittha.

"We will be more selective about which vendors we bring on board to ensure that we create a truly unparalleled atmosphere, where quality prod-

ucts and activities are delivered into the hands of the Phuket community," she says. "We want our visitors to have a wonderfully unique experience, as live music and light shows create the perfect ambiance."

The Lighthouse Market will return on January 29 and is scheduled to run every week until April 9, when the 'green season', also touted as the 'cruising season', is ushered in with the southwest monsoon.

TAT sets sights on Vietnamese and Indonesian tourist markets

THE Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) recently announced its plans to promote Phuket's image as a tourist destination in Vietnam and Indonesia.

Anoma Wongyai, director of TAT Phuket, touched on the positive response seen from tourists during this holiday season, with an 83 per cent increase in visitor numbers and 4.2 million baht of revenue generation.

"We now aim to target Asean markets, such as Vietnam and Indonesia, by holding international roadshows," said Ms Anoma. "I think roadshows will be instrumental in drawing larger numbers to Phuket."

Ms Anoma noted that the direct road route from Udon Thani makes it convenient to travel to Phuket, to some extent, for those who enjoy travelling to the island by car or bike.

However, she added that the



Ms Anoma

feasibility of a direct flight from Vietnam to Phuket is still questionable, as there are presently only about 10,000 Vietnamese tourists visiting the island annually.

"Indonesia is another great potential market with a population of about 250 million people, it is the most populated Asean country. This gives us an opportunity to target wealthy Indonesian tourists," said Ms Anoma.

— Sukawin Tanthavanich

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Pilots fly high to Hat Yai

Phuket-based private pilots flew to Hat Yai last weekend to participate in an air show organized by the Royal Thai Air Force for Children's Day. The event drew an estimate crowd of 30,000.



World-renowned American stunt pilot Les Vorosmarthy (left) and event organizer Group Captain Annop Nongchana, deputy commander of the Royal Thai Air Force's Wing 56 showed their stuff in front of thousands of attendees. Photo: Kanjana Ekkabuttra

Keeping up relations

Phuket International Hospital wished Phuket Provincial Public Relations Office a happy New Year.



BEST WISHES: (From L-R) Piyarat Kulvanich, marketing manager of Phuket International Hospital; Weerawat Yorseanrat, medical director of Phuket International Hospital; Busaya Jaipoom from Phuket Provincial Public Relations Office; and Jantima Teawsakul, sales supervisor of Phuket International Hospital.

Calling ground control

Aeronautical Radio of Thailand Ltd (Phuket Aerodrome/Approach Control Services) hosted a Children's Day event for Koh Maprao Phuket School on January 7. There were nearly 700 attendees at this fun event, which featured games and prizes for the little ones.

Napod Suknikom, regional assistant executive general manager at Phuket Aerodrome/Approach Control Services with a lucky prize winner.



Come one, come all

Central Festival Phuket entertained more than 2,000 children and parents with a fun family fair on January 9. Guests were treated to magic, music and dance performances by local artists and students.



Students perform a dance in front of more than 2,000 guests at Central Festival Phuket.



Giving the spirit of Christmas

In the spirit of Christmas, Angsana Laguna Phuket and Banyan Tree Phuket, along with guests and associates, were proud to be a part of 'Giving the spirit of Christmas' to the community by donating a portion of proceeds from every dinner sold on Christmas Eve towards providing Christmas gifts and goodies, as well as an additional donation of 200,000 baht, for the local Child Watch foundation.

GIVING BACK: Sriram Kailasam (2nd from left, back row), area general manager of Banyan Tree Phuket; Ungkhana Tosilanon (4th from left, back row), area director of human resources; Kantima Kullawit (5th from left, back row), assistant PR manager at Angsana Laguna Phuket; Rungtawan Pattarasuwannakit (7th from left, back row), CSR manager; Panee Yaowalee (2nd right, back row), assistant financial controller; Michelle Alejo (1st right, front row), assistant marketing and PR manager at Banyan Tree Phuket; along with guests and children from the foundation.

ents in Paradise

Kids by the Canal

Laguna Resorts & Hotels hosted the Laguna Phuket 24th Annual National Children's Day Celebration at Canal Shopping Village by the lagoon. There were a series of fun games, activities and entertainment for children and parents throughout the evening.



David Seet, Laguna Resorts & Hotels' senior assistant vice president-resort operations joins children on stage.

A family affair

More than 700 children and their parents enjoyed performances, fun and games with tonnes of free treats for the Children's Day at Boat Arcade, in Boat Lagoon, on January 9.



Students dance for onlookers at Boat Arcade's Children's Day event.

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Brutal new-age triathlon

Triple circumnavigation of Phuket proves too much for Aussie

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

AN AUSTRALIAN living and training on Phuket came to a staggering halt at about six kilometers from the end of his epic three-day, 430km challenge.

The endurance sport attempt began on January 3 as Damien Rider, 40, set out to circumnavigate Phuket by prone paddleboarding, stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) and running.

After deciding to combine prone and SUP, Mr Rider was just a couple hours past night-fall on day one of the trip when things became scary and he was forced to shorten the challenge.

"The first day on the paddleboard was my toughest paddle to date. Nothing was going in my favor and I was fighting with the board the whole time with side winds making it nearly impossible to get the board to where I wanted it to go," Mr Rider told the *Gazette*. "I then had to paddle through the night and came across a new set of challenges: dodging boats while crossing bays. After 75km, I came in, slept for six hours and then took on the running lap of Phuket."

The truncation of the paddle brought Mr Rider's ambitious challenge down from 430km in three days to 205km in two days. But even that distance pushed the Aussie beyond his physical capabilities, as his



Though Mr Rider (left) fell short of the goal, he still considered the experience a win. Photo: Estelle Hi

body ground to a halt 6km shy of the end of the run.

"[It was] something that I've never experienced before... where my legs just stopped moving. I was keeping track of my pace with my Suunto GPS watch and I could see I was slowing down from a walking pace of 9 minutes per kilometer to 12 minutes to 17 minutes then 22 minutes – then I just stopped," he said with a laugh. "My head was saying walk, my legs just couldn't move. I was like a tree swaying in the breeze on the sidewalk. I was 6km out from Rawai Pier, my finish line, and 20 hours into my run."

Despite falling far short of his original challenge, Mr Rider was pleased with the results, returning the next day to 'painfully shuffle' the last six kilometers.

"I'm super happy with my result. I didn't get the three laps in three days only 1.5, but I knew going into it that there would only be a slim chance of succeeding if I had perfect conditions. I set the test that way, as I never wanted it to be easy... [or if] I could finish it. I know I went as far I could."

Even though his body shut down on the run, Mr Rider said the paddling was the most challenging aspect of the journey,

which is saying something given his history.

The Aussie made headlines in Phuket last year when he completed a local SUP adventure, circling the island to raise awareness for his self-funded organization: Paddle Against Child Abuse.

Prior to this, he found himself in international headlines as he paddled 800km of shark-infested waters off the east coast of Australia. The epic journey has been captured in the recently released National Geographic documentary *Heart of the Sea*.

"I've got to do a massive

shout out and [send] respect to Christian Griffith from Live For A Living. He took the run challenge on with a week's notice and flew 24 hours from the States to support me on it. [There was also] Darren Sherbain from Old Dog Coaching and Physiotherapy. Darren has always been my go-to guy here in Phuket for training and event preparation," Mr Rider said.

"We have all come through, and risen above, tough challenges in life and now we are sharing the tools for others to give them strength and pride in who they are."

Mr Rider also thanked Phuket local Charlie Arm, who provided support during the run.

"[He] is just one of those rare gems, so selfless with a heart of gold. He was our much-needed support on the run, with ice bags to coconuts to water, food everything. Words can't describe how important of a role he played, and executed it far beyond any expectations."

The new-age triathlon challenge is not something that Mr Rider plans to return to now that it's behind him.

"It's not that it was too hard, it's just that there are more challenges in other parts of the world I will start to train for... raising awareness against child abuse and showing how even when the toughest of challenges break you, you can pick yourself up and reach your goal."

December 15 - January 31. The 11th Junior Dublin Literary Awards for Thailand

The 11th Junior Dublin Literary Awards for Thailand is an essay contest for high school students.

If you are creative and enjoy writing in English you can win a free trip to Ireland. There are also cash prizes of 5000 to 10,000 baht. Write an essay on the theme 'World With No Boundaries' and send it to: thanat_soonationgroup.com.

The deadline for submission is January 31 2016.

For more information about the awards, visit www.facebook.com/njmagazinefanpage.

This event is now in its 11th year, is proudly sponsored by the *Phuket Gazette*.

January 29-31. Southern Architectural Expo 2016

The Association of Siamese Archi-

itects under Royal Patronage (ASA) is hosting the Southern Architectural Expo 2016 in Phuket.

The theme of the event is Yaap Roi (South Up) which is meant to reflect and promote the identity of the South.

Mr Prachya explained that education and economic development in the south have contributed to the increasing number of qualified architects in the area, which is why the ASA decided to organize the expo as a way to boost the local architectural industry.

The event will be held at Limelight Avenue in Phuket Town. The event will run from 10am-10pm each day and feature exhibitions, free consultations on building maintenance and networking opportunities with suppliers and architectural publications.

Entry to the expo is free.

WHAT'S ON in Phuket

This event is sponsored by PGTV and the *Phuket Gazette*.

February 5, 4:30pm-6:30pm. AMCHAM Trends in Sustain-

able Hospitality

The American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM) Greater Phuket Chapter has organized a tourism event to be led by Grace Kang of Greenview Hospitality from Singapore. The seminar will take place at the Keemala Resort in Kamala.

Ms Kang will address how sustainability helps hotels cut costs and increase overall satisfaction and loyalty from associates and guests.

Grace Kang as Managing Partner of Greenview will present tangible examples of actions hotels can take and the latest trends from around the world that are driving sustainability

into discussions at a strategic level including the trend of green meetings.

Natasha Eldred of Shine PR will moderate this seminar and give a short grass roots perspective on the change within Phuket's microcosm hotelscape using Keemala as an example of the changing attitudes that hotels are now embracing in their overall commitment to corporate social responsibility.

Registration for the seminar begins at 4:30pm in the Enchanted Hall at the resort with the session running from 5pm to 6pm. There is limited parking at this venue so please park on the road outside and the resort will transport you by buggy.

Admission is open to the public and is 100 baht for non-members. Networking drinks will follow the session. To sign up for the event, contact Sarudha Netsawang by email at orn@amchamthailand.com.

Aviators hit Hat Yai for huge airshow



By Stephen Fein

FOR the second consecutive year, a large contingent of recreational aviation enthusiasts from Phuket flew due south to Songkhla Province to take part in what could be the largest and most exciting air show in Thailand's history.

The event coincided with Thailand's National Children's Day, an annual event which is celebrated on the first Saturday after New Year.

One of the most highly anticipated events at this year's show was a stunt pilot display by none other than Les Vorosmarthy, the Malaysia-



The scene at last year's Children's Day airshow in Hat Yai, Songkhla. Photo: Pat James

based Hungarian whose aerial exploits aboard his German-built Extra 300 have been featured at several past events at Phuket Airpark.

One such maneuver is the so-called 'tail slide', when Les allows the engine to idle while the plane is rising skyward. As gravity takes its toll, the craft

comes to a stop in mid-air before going into free fall backwards. When the plummeting aircraft reaches a certain speed, the wind hits the tail and flips it right over.

There were also demonstrations of firefighting, air rescue operations – and lots of free snacks and gifts for the kids.

Pat James, safety manager at Phuket Airpark, led the Phuket contingent to the Royal Thai Air Force Wing 56 air base, located near Hat Yai International Airport in Songkhla.

"Last year's event was just unbelievable. There had to be 20,000 to 30,000 people who turned out throughout the

day... It was the first time such an event had been held there in over a decade, since the start of the problem of unrest in the Deep South region along the Malay border," Mr James said.

"It's incredible the amount of time and planning that must have gone into last year's event, including addressing all the security concerns. Our civil aviators from Phuket were really treated like VIP's from the moment we stepped off the planes," he said.

He made a point of thanking Wing 56 Commander Capt Aumarit Kanokkaew and his deputy Capt Annop Nongchana for involving the civil aviation sector in all the activities.

The crowd was treated to a number of aerial stunts, with everything from Royal Thai Air Force F16s, to five single-seat gyrocopters brought all the way from Phuket.

"The goal is to enlighten, entertain and educate," Mr James said.

ANA gains partner



Vietnam Airlines will gain a long-sought partner with ANA and funds to help it boost operational and management know-how. Photo: Ikarasawa

JAPAN'S ANA Holdings said it plans to buy an 8.8 per cent stake in state-controlled Vietnam Airlines, becoming its main strategic partner in a deal that values the South-East Asian carrier at about US\$1.2 billion.

The deal helps satisfy ANA's ambitions to expand in fast-growing regional markets after it backed out of a 2013 deal to buy a 49 per cent stake in Myanmar's Asian Wings Airways for US\$25 million due to concerns over excessive competition in the country.

Vietnam's flagship carrier in turn gains a long-sought partner and funds to help it boost operational and management know-how. Although it completed an IPO in 2014, raising US\$51mn by selling 3.5 per cent of the company, it has yet

to list as its return on equity is still far below the 5 per cent level required by law.

The sale could be completed as soon as the middle of this year, Vietnam Airlines chief executive officer Pham Ngoc Minh told Reuters.

The 8.8 per cent stake sale for US\$108mn is a boost for the government's privatization drive, which has been criticized as sluggish and lacking appeal, but falls short of the 20 per cent holding that the airline had been seeking to sell to strategic partners.

It was not immediately clear if Vietnam Airlines was still interested in other partners.

The carrier commands about half of the domestic market while two affiliates have another combined 15 per cent share.

– Reuters

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Go pro with PADI freediving courses

Diving

By Isaac Stone Simonelli

THE branding and professional support provided by PADI, as it moves into the freediving industry with an entire set of courses specific to the sport, looks to create new opportunities for those wanting to become professional freediving instructors.

"PADI has a massive background in marketing and supporting businesses, which means that a sustainable career in freediving will likely become more feasible" says Richard Wonka, co-

owner with Sarah Witcher of the Phuket-based Freediving Instructor Training Center 'We Freedive'.

Though at a glance it might seem that interested, knowledgeable scuba diving instructors will be prime candidates for becoming

freediving instructors, the physiological effects of the two sports make it unsafe for an instructor to teach scuba diving one day and freediving the next.

Because of this, PADI vowed to give the same kind of business support and promotion it provides to scuba schools to the new PADI freediving schools, which will have no association with the scuba diving side of the industry.

The first such school in Asia is destined to be Phuket's We Freedive, confirmed Andy Auer, PADI Thailand West Coast regional manager.

"The marketing support of PADI and the PADI brand is very strong. If you put their logo somewhere, it really means something," Mr. Auer said.

To jump start the program, PADI is making it easy to do a cross over from other certifi-

ing agencies, marking a significant change in approach by encouraging this cross over for scuba instructors.

"It's very easy for instructors to adapt to that kind of environment and teach this program. So what we have now is instructors from other training organizations wanting to cross over and teach the PADI freediving course, because the materials are great and it's up-to-date. It's the newest in the market," Mr. Auer said. "We've made it easy for people to cross over. They just have to take the PADI orientation, show us proof of experience and that they are already an instructor with another organization. And basically that's it."

PADI scuba diving instructors, who are looking to make changes in their career path, are able to get the entry-level freediving instructor certification by taking the first two of three student-level freediving courses.

Dive masters and assistant scuba diving instructors are also able to obtain their freediving instructor certification by completing all three student-level freediving courses.



How much potential is there in the freediving market. Photo: Ben eBaker

"However, these are just for receiving your PADI freediver instructor certification, which authorizes you to teach the PADI Basic Freediving course. Those wanting to teach the advanced course need to be a PADI advanced freediving instructor and those wanting to teach the master freediver course, must

be PADI master freediver instructors," Mr. Auer said.

"We have an enormous database of divers and a massive social media following, so through our communications channels, we are seeing a lot of interest which will lead to increased opportunities for certified PADI Freediver Instructors."



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When dogs attack: ownership laws



Law & Order
By Robert Virasin

THERE are a growing number of dog owners in Thailand who treat their animals like their children, prized possessions, or members of the family. With the growing number of pet owners, there have been an increased number of disputes involving domesticated animals. We have recently been contacted about a number of dog biting cases.

One such case involved a Thai national with an expensive small purebred toy dog. She lives in a wealthy gated community with large homes and many foreigners. As part of her daily exercise routine, she likes to take her dog for a morning walk around the neighborhood.

One of her neighbors was a British man who had taken in two large street dogs as pets. The British man used the dogs to guard his home and the dogs stayed outside the home but within his gated property.

Whenever anyone walked by the gated home, the dogs would bark and make a lot of commotion. The guard dogs would regularly escape and terrorize the neighborhood whenever the British man's



Taking possession of an animal makes you legally liable for torts caused by them. Photo: Eric Schmuttenmaer

gate was left open.

The Thai woman would sometimes see the British man's dogs run free in the neighborhood. His dogs never attacked the woman but would bark and attempt to bite her small dog. The woman was always able to grab her little dog to protect him until last month. The British man's servant left the gate open and the dogs escaped. They entered the Thai woman's property and attacked her little dog. Before the woman was able to rescue

her little dog, it was grabbed and shaken for several minutes. Her dog died at the veterinary hospital from injuries as a result of the attack about 14 hours later.

What can the Thai woman do?

Under section 433 of the Thai Civil and Commercial Code, the British man is responsible to compensate the injured party for damage caused by his dogs. The damage in the above case is to the Thai woman's property, which is her toy dog. The Thai

woman can file a lawsuit against the British man for the dog's medical expenses and the replacement cost of a new purebred toy dog. Even though the attack was vicious, Thailand places restrictions on monetary claims for emotional distress. So she would probably not be able to receive any compensation for emotional distress.

If the British man was negligent in allowing his dogs to escape and the dogs were known to have been of a vicious nature, the British man

can be sued for criminal actions. He can be found guilty under section 358 of the Thai Penal Code, for damaging, destroying, or for causing destruction of the property of another as a result of negligent actions. In addition, Section 377 of the Thai Penal Code states that the owner is responsible for a vicious animal if they are allowed to wander freely and is likely to cause injury to persons or property. Both crimes provide for imprisonment and/or a fine.

When someone takes possession of an animal, that person can become legally liable for torts caused by the animal. And, while most pet owners treat their cats or dogs like their children, in the eyes of the law, they are only property. For most pet owners, the replacement value is not enough to relieve the suffering caused by the loss of their pet.

Additional reporting by Yutthachai Sangsirisap.

Robert R. Virasin is a licensed US attorney and managing director of Virasin & Partners. Yutthachai Sangsirisap is a licensed Thai attorney at Virasin & Partners. They can be reached at info@virasin.com or at www.virasin.com.

NLA considers special panel on reconciliation

THE National Legislative Assembly (NLA) is mulling the establishment of a special committee to study options that can be taken to promote reconciliation and peace in Thai society, NLA president Pornpetch Wichitcholchai said.

Mr Pornpetch said the aim of the committee is to seek ways to promote reconciliation and mend rifts in society.

The panel, expected to be made up of more than 20 representatives from all concerned political parties and groups, would be invited to participate in the initiative, Mr Pornpetch said.

The NLA would consider and later endorse the setting up of the committee, Mr Pornpetch said, adding that it would come up with a framework within six months after being established.



NLA President Pornpetch Wichitcholchai. Photo: The Nation

Once the committee comes up with a report, the NLA will decide whether it goes to the Cabinet or the National Reform Steering Assembly (NRSA), in order to implement recommendations.

— The Nation

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Inside look at hotel licencing crisis



CRISIS? What Crisis? At long last the ticking time bomb of unlicensed accommodation establishments in Phuket has finally made headlines. The furor of action was capped as the Thai Hotels Association (THA) Southern Chapter issued a formal letter of complaint to the Governor's Office asking for action, given an out of control spread of hotels operating without licences.

To fully understand the issue of unlicensed hotels, you have to understand this is not a new development and has been going on for decades. At the onset one of the key drivers was tax related. First is the national government tax of seven per cent. The base was increased in 1997, when the country enacted a provincial tax under the newly created OrBorJor administrative body. This tax was set at one per cent, but in fact is capped at three per cent.

Two issues are at the root of tax transparency. Certainly on the seven per cent national tax, this is linked to total revenue for the hotel and has implications on a wider scale for hotel owners. It has not been an uncommon practice for smaller hotels to keep



The Thai Hotel Association lodged a formal complaint to the Governor's Office. Photo: Kritsada Mueanhawong

different sets of books to under-value their income tax payments. As for the OrBorJor tax, this has historically been a widely disputed item with local hotel owners objecting to tax payments that resulted in projects which have been, and continue to be, contentious.

Over the years we have viewed a number of hotel properties coming up for sale and one of the first basic items in due diligence is the confirmation of a current hotel licence for the actual number of rooms. In our experience, there continues to be a sizable number of hospitality assets that either have no licence, or there is a wide variance between the actual hotel rooms and

those listed in the licence. The bottom line is that the longer term issue has been tax avoidance.

Moving into the new millennium a new issue emerged with villas and condos/apartments being developed. In the late 1980s and 1990s, this issue was not envisaged in many agreements and, in fact, the Hotel Act for the country only later, in 2004, was amended to address the anomaly of serviced apartments selling daily accommodation.

For the past 10 years, investment properties geared toward rental yields and hotel-type operations have grown consistently and are now a significant component of the island's ho-

tel inventory. In most cases there is no hotel licence for such projects, and hence no tax collection.

From a legislative standpoint the existing Hotel Act as amended in 2004 is onerous for small hotels and those with residential components. There are building restrictions, requirements for experience and an overall process that relies strongly on application approval by local government.

Two other obstacles have created issues as well. Firstly, compliance to the Building Control Act must be made before the hotel licence application is processed. This has created roadblocks for residential prop-

erties, conversions and those owners who wish to legalize existing hotels that do not have licences. Secondly, the current existing Condominium Act broadly restricts long term tenure for hotel operators. This is a significant problem for developments that are marketed for rental returns. How can buyers ensure the long term-viability of an investment?

A most troubling issue today is the surging number of billboards for properties offering guaranteed returns to buyers. In many cases these properties cannot obtain a hotel licence, which in the longer term means they cannot generate the anticipated rental revenue.

Illegal hotels are a plague to Phuket as they stress the island's infrastructure and the associated greed has created a dangerous paradigm of simply taking, instead of putting anything back into the island. Reforms are needed both at provincial and national levels. As for buyers of property in a rental scheme, if you expect long term returns, make sure the development into which you are considering buying has a valid licence.

Bill Barnett is the founder and managing director of C9 Hotelworks (C9Hotelworks.com), a leading Thailand-based hospitality and real estate consulting firm.

Luxury condos for Myanmar buyers



Myanmar's income is among the lowest in the world. Photo: Paul Arps

MYANMAR'S per capita annual income, at US\$1,204, may be among the lowest in the world, but KAE Alliance believes there are plenty of rich people in Myanmar who can afford a luxury condominium unit outside the country.

After offering condos in Singapore in the Myanmar market, the company unveiled some luxury condominiums in the Paradiso Nuova Medini project, in the heart of Malaysia's

Iskandar development, about 15 minutes from Singapore.

Kyaw Min Zin, chief executive officer of KAE Alliance, said the recent depreciation of the ringgit against Myanmar's kyat offered a great opportunity for such an investment, aside from a 10-year residence permit.

The company is hopeful as more than 40 units were sold last month, and two buyers were Myanmar citizens.

— *The Nation*

LPN aims for 13.5 per cent revenue increase

LPN Development has budgeted up to 10 billion baht to buy land and build 10 condominium projects worth 17.6bn baht with the aim of boosting revenue by 13.5 per cent this year.

Up to 3bn baht will be used to buy land for developing condos this year and next, whereas the remaining 7bn baht is for constructing infrastructure for the new condos.

More than 60 per cent of the budget will be funded from internal cash flow and the rest from project loans extended by commercial banks.

"We believe that the condo market will recover strongly in the first four months of this year before the government's measure to boost the property market expires at the end of



LPN has budgeted 10bn baht for expansion. Photo: Anurupa Chowdhury

April. We expect up to 65,000 new condo units to be launched this year, up 8 per cent from last year," said Managing Director Opas Sripayak.

The company expects to transfer condos worth up to 10bn baht in the first four months of this year and has a backlog worth 11bn baht of

units pre-sold to customers and waiting to be delivered when construction is completed.

Last year, the company transferred condos worth 15.5bn baht to customers, lower than its estimate, but still higher than its total revenue in the previous year, Mr Opas said.

— *The Nation*

Luxury living at Pavilions Phuket

By Sahar Aftab Paliwala

THE stream of holiday makers to Phuket's shores are spoiled for choice when it comes to choosing a vacation spot. Boasting more than two dozen beaches, Phuket offers plenty of variety and flexibility for all tastes and budgets.

For seasoned travelers who value tranquility and privacy above all else, Layan Beach is a good option to explore. One of Phuket's lesser known beaches, Layan is situated on the northern end of Bangtao Beach on the west coast, and offers a pristine, unspoiled ambiance that one would be hard pressed to find in other places on the island.

Layan Beach is home to some of Phuket's most magnificent properties, courtesy of the patronage of several large developers, hotels and resorts. Situated on a hillside just off Layan Beach, 'The Pavilions Phuket' is an up-market luxury development built on a 44,000 sqm plot.

This secluded 'adults only' villa hotel includes 49 villas with up to three bedrooms. Options include ocean view,



The 360-degree bar offers a panoramic view of the island. Photo: The Pavilions Phuket

tropical pool villa and pent-house villa. The villas range in size from 275sqm to about 600sqm, and each offers various choices, such as a sundeck, sala, infinity pool, Jacuzzi and even a fully equipped kitchen, winning it the 2015 Best Luxury Boutique Spa award at the World Luxury Spa Awards.

"Our market is primarily couples seeking privacy and

seclusion and not the activities and hustle and bustle of [more crowded beaches such as] Patong," says Resident Manager Simona Chimenti.

An added advantage to private villa properties such as The Pavilions Phuket is the fact that they are unfazed by the confusion concerning zoning regulations by the government.

"There is no direct impact for

us as we are a boutique property featuring private pool villas and our guests do not necessarily book Pavilions for a beachside vacation," says Ms. Chimenti.

However, overall perception of the destination has been negatively affected, she adds.

Although The Pavilions Phuket offers a break from the otherwise noisy, tourist-centered destinations, it has jumped on the

Chinese free independent market [FIT] traveler bandwagon.

There has been a boom of organized Chinese group tourism over the last couple of years, Ms Chimenti says. She also explains that there has been a flattening in occupancy throughout the last few years, with fewer guests in the high season, but increased occupancy levels during the traditional low season from May to October.

Like any business in Phuket, Pavilions is not impervious to market factors such as the multiple travel warnings issued by main feeder markets.

"The impact is hard to measure, but over the past five years, there have been recurring incidents tarnishing Thailand's position as a prime tourist destination," Ms Chimenti adds.

The multi award-winning residences have been designed to offer maximum privacy, surrounded by stunning natural beauty and lush tropical views. Situated on an ideal vantage point in the hills, it also houses a 360-degree bar to enjoy a panoramic view of the island and watch the intoxicating Phuket sunset.



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Please contact 086-4769612
email: annanoi1@hotmail.com

Royal Place condo, Phuket City, bypass road, opposite Tesco Lotus, 37 Sqm, 2 fl. Studio room, fully furnished.

**LOFT STYLE FLAT
KATHU**

Two furnished flats. Good exercise location, secure. 85,000 baht / month. Long term. Tel: 086-664 5575. Email: hkmsn@yahoo.com

**BUILDING
PRODUCTS &
SERVICES****BUILDING MATERIALS**

Diamond roof tiles (brick red - fiber twin point sheet) purchased from Homeworks. 20 baht or best offer for whole stock of 500. Contact Jo. Tel: 081-538 2110 (English & Thai). Email: Philip.gregory001@gmail.com

**HOLIDAY HOMES
& VILLA RENTALS****HOLIDAY RENTAL**

Swimming pool 2-bedroom villa. Rawai. Available in February 2016. Tel: 085-787 3046.

1-BED BUNGALOW RAWAI

50sqm, big terrace, kitchen, aircon, WiFi, fully furnished. 9,000 baht / month. Email: bricothailand@hotmail.com

PATONG LUXURY APT.

Paradise Hotel Complex. 150m to beach, large 1 bedroom, kitchen, light, airy. Tel: 086-276 7608.

**PHUKET TOWN EUROPEAN STANDARD
APARTMENT**

2-bedroom apartment, swimming pool, very quiet, parking. 20,000 baht monthly. Tel: 089-471 1805. Email: paul.bataillard@gmail.com

**ACCOMMODATION
AVAILABLE****KATHU
PHUKET GOLF VIEW**

Completely renovated studio 60sqm in the heart of Kathu, 10 minutes to Central Festival, 15 minutes to Patong, quiet green area 24,000 baht monthly. Tel: 087-801 9797 (English). Email: cuaca2000@hotmail.com

**LOFT STYLE FLAT
KATHU**

Two furnished flats. Good exercise location, secure. 85,000 baht / month. Long term. Tel: 086-664 5575. Email: hkmsn@yahoo.com

**1&2 BEDROOM FOR RENT
GOLF LAND VIEW**

Near Loch Palm Golf Place with golf land view. 1 bedroom: 15,000 baht and 2 bedrooms: 20,000 baht/month. Fully furnished, fan/aircon, WiFi, cable TV, pool. Long-term rent. Tel: 085-792 5544. Email: golflandview@gmx.de

**HOLIDAY RENTAL
KARON BEACH**

Superb, 160sqm, 2-bed condos, 5-minute walk from beach/town. Please contact by email: gmseasia@gmail.com

**HOUSE IN BURASIRI
KOH KAEW**

For rent. 3 bedrooms, fully furnished house. Near BIS. Long term rental: 40,000 baht per month. Phuket Town. Tel: 081-597 6195. Fax: 076-294393. Email: unique_property@hotmail.com

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HOUSE**

1-3 bedrooms. Quiet area. Fully furnished. Tel: 081-892 4311. <http://palaigreen.weebly.com>

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- Year of Manufacture: 2002
- Equipment: Full standard equipment
- Engine: Rotax 912-80hp 350hrs. Tel: 081-840 8418.

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JETSKI YAMAHA VRX 1.8L

67-year-old owner, perfect condition. 350,000 baht. Tel: 089-470 8926. Email: jyfievet@gmail.com

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1989 vessel, powered by twin Hino engines, 360hp each, fully air-conditioned. Chalong. For more information, please call 087-834 5293. Email: info@thebigblues.com

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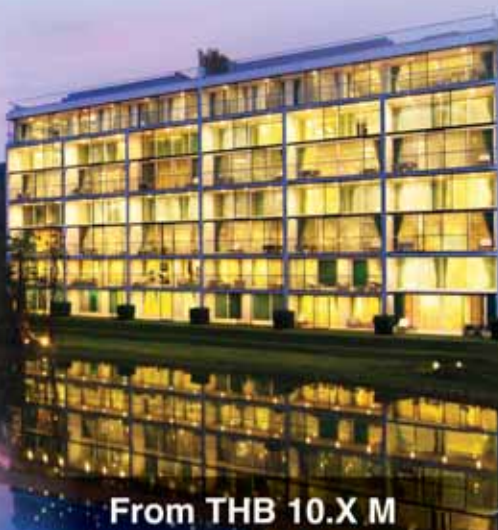
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